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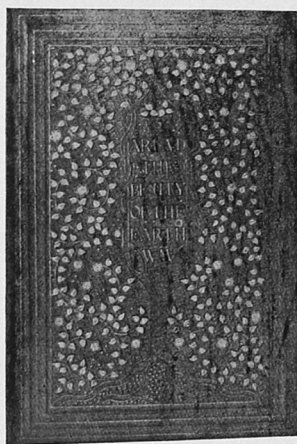
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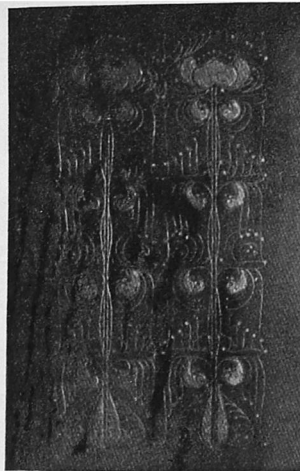
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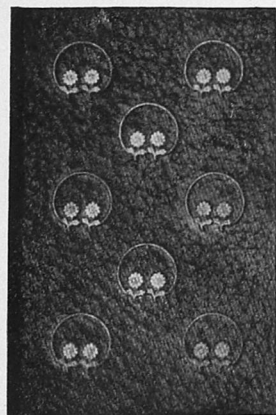
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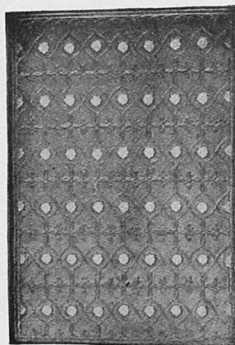
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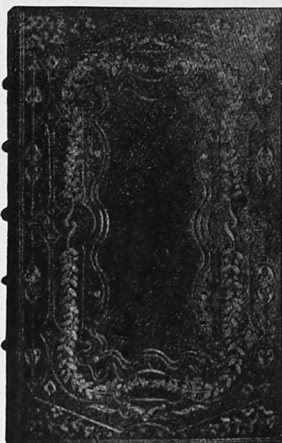
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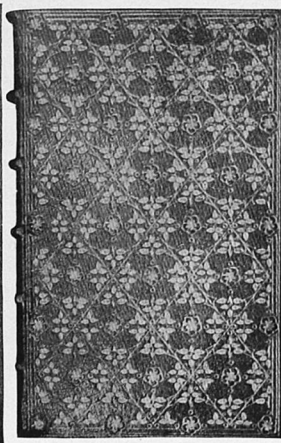
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EXAMPLES OF BOOKBINDING

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BRUSH AND PENCIL

ILLUSTRATED ART NEWS SECTION

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No. 2

THE ART INDUSTRIES OF AMERICA—VI

THE BINDING OF BOOKS

The artistic binding of books is an industry in America that is commanding the attention of an ever-increasing number of talented workers. It is not merely the employment of factory operatives, who follow it as a trade; it has invaded the home and the studio, and won the devotions of men and women who are artists in the truest sense of the term. It has the same fascination that characterizes any art in which the mere production of the beautiful is in a measure sufficient reward for the pains bestowed upon the work. Whether fine bookbinding as a vocation or studio practice—outside of the regular binderies—can be made sufficiently remunerative to warrant those who have taste for the art giving their whole time to it, is another question. The average person, of course, is content with the cases usually put on books by publishers, and the great libraries look for durability rather than choice execution. Still, in every community where wealth abounds there are book-lovers who are willing to pay for the finest work that can be produced, and it is to these that the art binders naturally must look for the genuine appreciation that is necessary for stimulus and encouragement in the performance of their labor, but, what is even more to the point, for



SPECIMEN OF BOOKBINDING
By Marius Michel



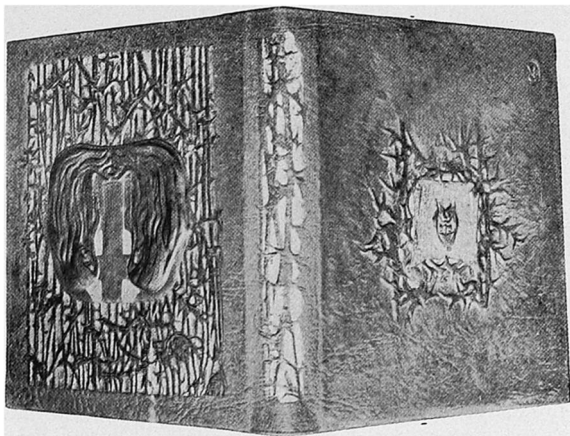
SPECIMEN OF BOOKBINDING
By M. Meunier

their patronage. It would seem that this growing class of connoisseurs promises, in the near future at least, a lucrative field for able workmen.

Like most of the higher types of industrial arts, the details of bookbinding are little known to the average user of books. Indeed, many of these details, perhaps, are of little interest, except to the select few who combine with their love of the beautiful a desire to know how it is produced. This article therefore will purposely be general rather than specific, and the minutiae of gathering, stitching, pasting, board-cutting, and so forth, will be summarized. It

is most important for the general reader to know what constitutes good binding—good workmanship and material—and what to avoid in the dress he gives his volumes. As regards taste, no canons can be laid down, for taste is a matter of change, shifting with the lapse of time, and besides, what would recommend itself to one collector might not appeal to another.

That modern bookbinding has sadly deteriorated one must frankly confess—this is said, of course, from the practical rather than the artistic side of the work. It has been estimated that ninety per cent of the best bound books of the day will require rebinding



EXAMPLES OF BOOKBINDING
By Mme. Folsey-Risler

within the next twenty-five or thirty years. The binding of a former day, which lasted practically unimpaired for generations, often for hundreds of years, are a thing of the past. The Society of Arts Committee, in England, undertook by careful examination to ascertain the causes of this premature decay, and its findings, which are given below, are worth careful consideration. Said the report:

"1. Books are sewn on too few and too thin cords, and the slips are pared down unduly (for the sake of neatness), and are not in all cases



LEATHER-WORK—MAGAZINE COVERS

By Mrs. Amelia H. Center

firmly laced into the boards. This renders the attachment of the boards to the book almost entirely dependent upon the strength of the leather.

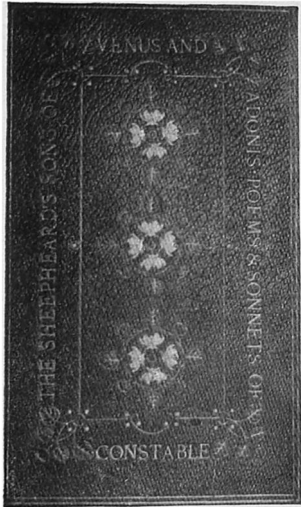
"2. The use of hollow backs throws all the strain of opening and shutting on the joints, and renders the back liable to come right off if the book is much used.

"3. The leather of the back is apt to become torn, through the use of insufficiently strong head-bands, which are unable to stand the strain of the book being taken from the shelf.

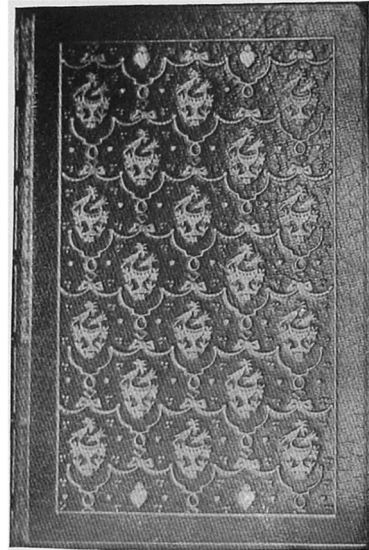
"4. It is a common practice to use far too thin leather; especially to use large thick skins very much pared down for small books. This questionable custom of necessity greatly weakens the strength of the leather, and not infrequently sadly militates against the appearance of the surface.

"5. The leather is often made very wet, and stretched a great deal in covering, with the result that on drying it is further strained, almost to the breaking-point, by contraction, leaving a very small margin of strength to meet the accidents of use."

To the uninitiated in the art of bookbinding this citation of bad practices may need some explanation, and this perhaps can best be given by following in a brief, cursory way the sheets of a book through the various stages of binding. Every one, of course, knows that a book is printed in large sheets—four, eight, sixteen, twenty-two, or even more pages to



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ARTISTIC BOOKBINDING

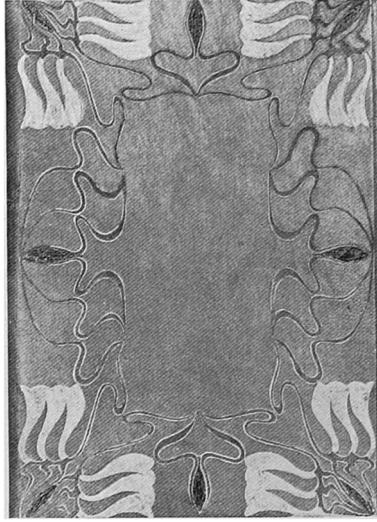
1. By Ellen Gates Starr. 2. By Zaehnsdorf

the sheet—so that when the sheets are folded the pages are consecutive. These sheets, when properly folded so that the paging is consecutive, constitute what are known as the signatures of the book, being regularly numbered. The binder's first care is to see that the sheets are folded with precision, so that the printed matter is square on the page and the margins are of uniform width. All imperfect pages must be mended, and all defective folds must be backed so as to be strong enough to hold the stitches. Then the folded sheets, or signatures, after being collated so as to make sure that nothing is missing, pass on to the sewer. Formerly, cords or tapes—five in number—were stretched across a frame, and the signatures were sewn to these in such a way that the cords or tapes made actual projec-

tions from the back of the book. Nowadays the back of the book is sawn across and the cords or tapes are sunk. The sewing being completed, the volume is placed in a frame or vise and the edges of the back are carefully hammered down so as to give it the rounded appearance of the finished work. The sewing, it may be observed, should be done with the best flax or with ligature silk, and the back should be kept as flat as possible without forcing it, and without danger of its becoming concave with use. The importance both of the quality of the thread and of the manner of the workmanship will readily be understood even by the novice in bookbinding. Then the rounded back is thoroughly glued; covers of the right size are cut from good black millboard, and put in proper position; the ends of the

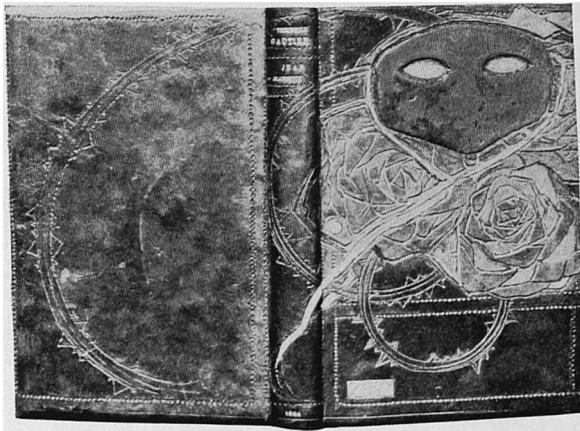
cords or tapes crossing the back are let into the board by means of gimlet-holes and securely glued; the head-bands—little strips of cord or catgut—

are sewed on the tops and bottom to give strength to the volume; the leather for back and corners is cut and securely glued in place; the book is gilded and decorated; the side cloth or paper is pasted on; and the volume, after pressing and cleaning, is ready for de-



STAINED LEATHER BOOK COVER

By Helen McKay



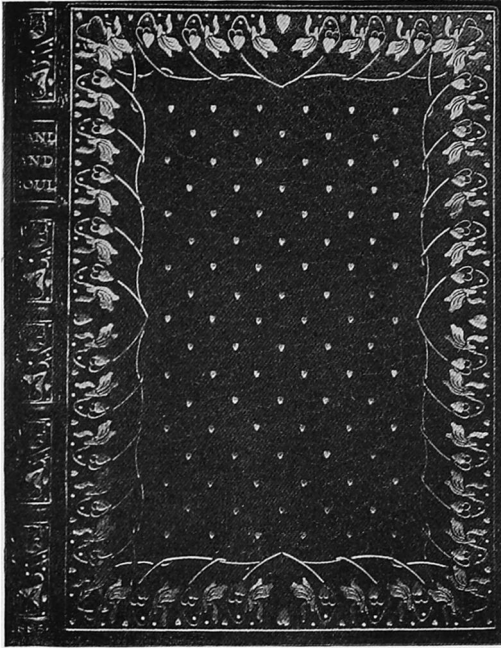
EXAMPLE OF BOOKBINDING

By Edouard Benédicte

livery. This is a mere outline of procedure, given as a basis for comment; little details, sufficient to make a volume, have been omitted from the actual process, the student being referred for further minutiae to the hand-books on binding.

The prime causes for the deterioration of modern bookbinding are neatness and cheapness. The old books that stood so well the wear and tear of years were cumbersome, and often they did not open with the freedom

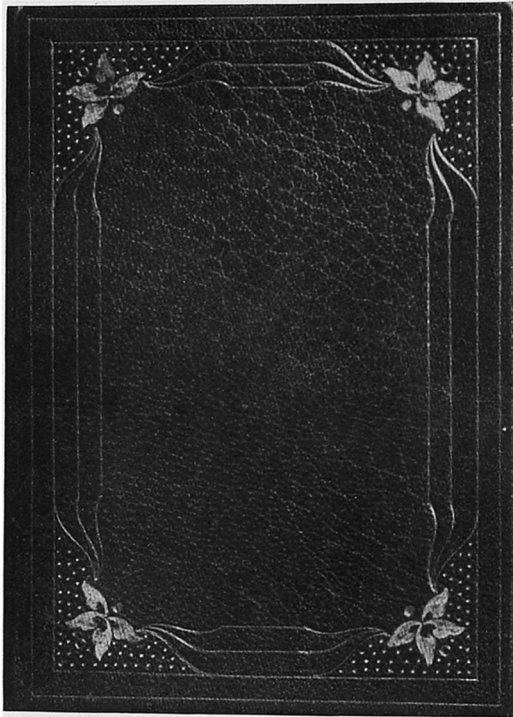
desired. The leather was glued tight to the backs of the signatures, so that when the book was opened the back bent in, to the detriment of the gold decoration. To obviate this, some clever workman conceived the idea of lining the leather back, so that when the book was opened the glued backs of the signatures dropped in and the padded leather back sprang out. This saved the decoration on the back from being bent and mutilated, but it was the initial step in a false practice. It soon resulted in sinking the cords or tapes, upon which the volume must depend for



HAND AND SOUL
By Ellen G. Starr

strength, in grooves cut across the back of the signatures, and the raised bands across the leather became mere hollow decorations. In the early days of bookbinding, each of these raised bands in the leather had a cord or a tape in it, over which every thread in the book passed. Latterly, the cords or tapes being buried in the back of the book and thus out of sight, binders sewed the signatures on three cords instead of five, and even on two—the deceptive five bands still appearing in the leather of the back. It will readily be seen that the absence of sufficient cords on which to stitch the leaves throws most of the strain of opening the book on the leather.

Again, the desire for neatness became manifest—to the detriment of the binding—in the weakening of the headbands and the thinning of the cover-boards. The importance of the headbands is apparent from the fact that it is by direct purchase on these that books are commonly taken from the shelves; and the necessity of adequately thick cover-boards from the fact that it is in holes in these that the cords to which the leaves are stitched are anchored. Then, again, the effort to avoid a thick



ARTISTIC BOOKBINDING
By Margaret Sterling

or bunched appearance resulted in the use of very thin leather, or the paving down of an ordinary skin to half its usual thickness. The craze for neatness at any cost is also responsible for the use of leather in a very wet condition, so that it could be stretched tauter and worked more readily.

So much for the conspicuous evils that characterize nine tenths of our present-day bookbinding. It is these evils that the better class of workmen are strenuously seeking to eliminate. In other words, in bookbinding, as in more than one other art industry, there is a tendency to revert to the methods of earlier days. This has been pointed out in

two former articles of this series—that on stained-glass work and that on china-decorating. Whatever else may be said of early art work, this must be said—it was genuine. It was honest work done by honest workmen. And the sooner the art craftsmen of to-day abandon mere tinsel, spurious makeshifts, and cheap materials, the better.

This matter of poor materials is one of the bugbears of the binder who wishes to do substantial as well as artistic work. Modern processes

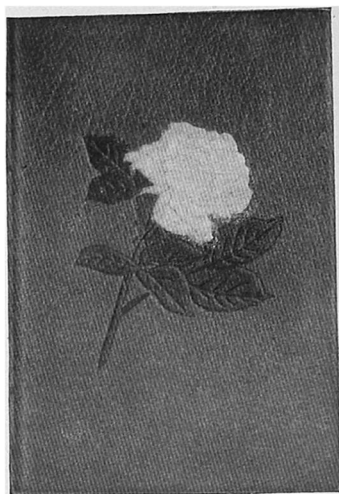
of manufacture and practices of adulteration are often charged to the binder. This is conspicuously and notoriously true of leathers, many of which are treated with injurious acids or given an artificial grain, to the detriment of the leather. Many of the leathers commonly put on the costliest books, such as the calf and levant morocco, are worthless. Speaking of pretentious shams in the way of bindings Dougglas Cockerell said, in a recently published monograph, that the man who countenanced cheap show usually got just what he paid for. "The polished calf and imitation crushed morocco," said he, "must go, and in its place a rougher, thicker leather must be employed. The full-gilt backs must go, the colored lettering panel must go, the hollow backs must go, but in the place of these we may have the books sewn on tapes with the ends securely fastened into split boards, and the thick leather attached directly to the backs of the sections."

As regards the decoration of books, no rules can be laid down, nor, indeed, except in a very vague way, can general principles be enunciated. It has been, and must be, largely a matter of the taste and skill of the binder. With a proper leather surface, good gold-leaf, and suitable tools, the binder must be left to his own resources. An exceedingly ornate binding need not be a tasteless one, nor need a very simple design be lacking in beauty. What one book, by virtue of its contents, can stand in the way of ornamentation would make another book seem overdone, if not ridiculous. The accompanying examples of American and European work are a suggestion of the wide possibilities of the art. The decoration of most books, perhaps, adheres too closely to tradition, and is too much circumscribed by precedent. That this need not be is shown by our illustrations. There is wide scope for originality of expression, refinement of idea, poetic symbolism. The designs that can successfully be worked out with even a limited assortment of tools is marvelous, and not a little of the charm of the work inheres in the overcoming of difficulties and the solving of the more or less intricate problems that present themselves. Americans have shown that they are not wanting in ideas or cleverness, and it is to be hoped that the efforts of our best binders may result not merely in the abolishment of meretricious design, but in the utter rejection of materials little calculated to stand the test of time and wear. Until this is done the work must be a reflection on the worker.

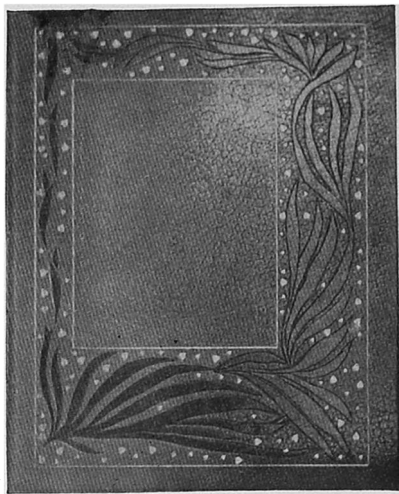
Leather, more than any other material entering into bookbinding, needs careful watching. It is possible with little trouble to get pure flax thread or pure ligature-silk, fine glue, and excellent paste. Paper is a more doubtful quantity, but paper of excellent quality can be had without prolonged search. But leather should be subjected to the severest test, since much of it is spoiled for the purpose for which it is made by the ingredients used in its preparation. In general, morocco (goatskin) pigskin, and sealskin are the safest leathers to use. Expensive levant, moroccos, and vegetable-tanned calfskin are scarcely worth putting on books. Sheepskin is fairly satisfactory in its plain undoctored state, but

lacks elegance; and sheepskin, or any other kind of leather that has been given an artificial grain is more than apt to be ruined.

The Society of Arts Committee in England is to be congratulated on its thorough investigations into and its findings respecting bookbindings, and its report on leathers in particular may be taken as authoritative. It found that books bound in the last eighty or one hundred years showed far greater evidences of deterioration than those of an earlier date, and that while the evidences of deterioration became manifest in 1830, it was



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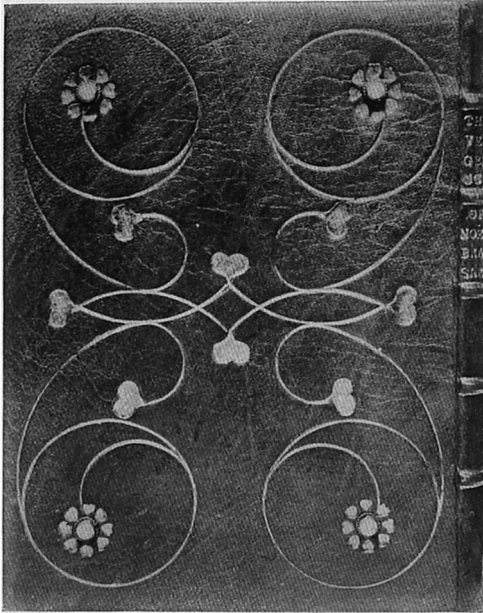


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ARTISTIC BOOKBINDING

1. By Ralph Randolph Adams. 2. By Marguerite Lahey

not until about 1860 that the worst era set in. Of the old leathers (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), white pigskin was found to be the most durable. Old brown calfskin had lasted fairly well, but lost its flexibility and became brittle when exposed to the air and light. Some white tanned skins, probably deerskin, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had lasted well, as had some sheepskins of the same period. Early red morocco of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries was found in good condition, and similar morocco manufactured since 1830 was found utterly rotten. During the latter part of the eighteenth century it became the practice to pare down calfskin till it was little thicker than paper, and since 1830 scarcely any really sound calfskin seems to have been used. Since 1860 sheepskin, as sheepskin, is hardly to be found, and the sheepskins grained in imitation of other leathers were found to be practically worthless.



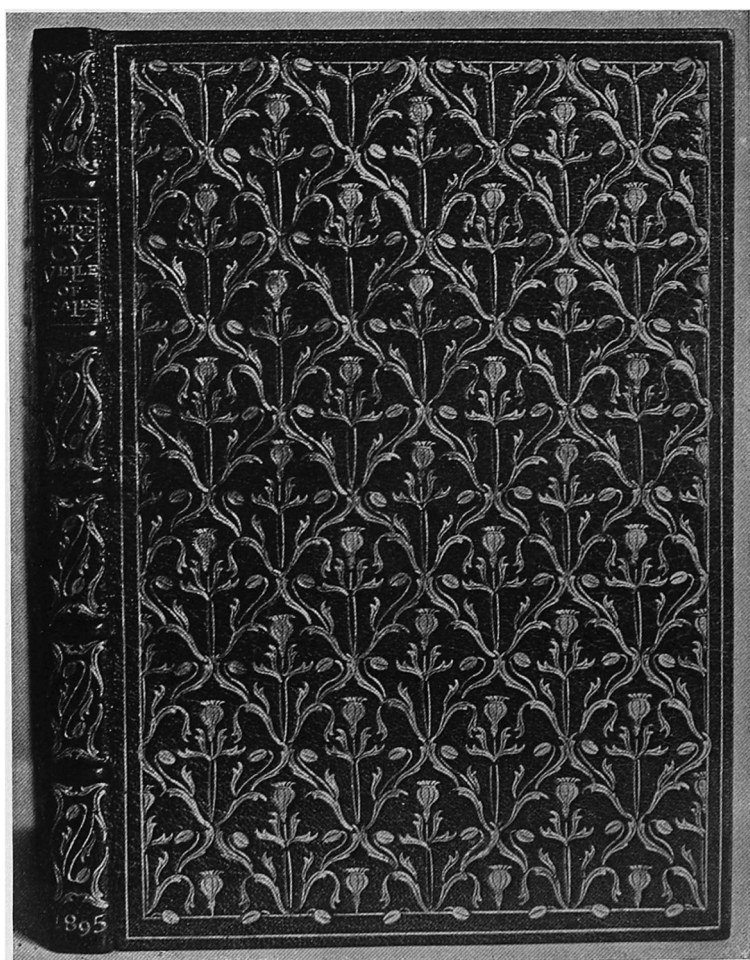
ARTISTIC BOOKBINDING
By May Rosina Prat

In general terms, the committee condemns all leathers in which mineral acids have been used in the curing or dyeing. Sulphuric acid was found to be present in almost all present-day leathers. On the other hand, it cordially recommends leathers tanned by means of sumach. The report gives this very good advice, which it would be well for modern bookbinders to heed: "It is the opinion of the committee that the ideal bookbinding leather must have, and retain, great flexibility. It must have a firm grain surface, not easily damaged by friction, and should not be artificially grained. The commit-

tee is of the opinion that a pure sumach tannage will answer all these conditions, and that leather can, and will, be now produced that will prove to be as durable as any made in the past."

A closing word as to the prevailing kinds of decay found in book-leathers. The most noticeable was what the committee called red decay, which it thought should be differentiated into old and new, the old obtaining in books found prior to and the new in books bound subsequent to 1830. In the old red decay the leather becomes hard and brittle and is easily abraded by friction. This was found to be most prevalent in calf-bound books, tanned presumably with oak-bark. The new form affects all leathers, and ultimately absolutely destroys the leather fiber. Another form of deterioration, more noticeable in these newer books, renders the grain of the leather liable to peel off when subjected to the least friction. This is the most common form of decay found in recent leathers. Russian leather was found to be especially subject to this new form of red decay.

ERNEST E. MEYER.



EXAMPLE OF BOOKBINDING
By Ellen G. Starr

